**REMARKS BY KWAZULU-NATAL PREMIER NOMUSA DUBE-NCUBE DURING THE LAUNCH OF DIARY SESSION FOR WOMEN AT PHOENIX ON TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2022**

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Phumelele Mngomezulu;

Members of Sibaya Community Trust;

Women Organisations;

Senior Government Officials;

Virtual Participants;

Members from NGOs;

Women Solidarity Movements;

Organised Women Formations;

Students and Activist Bodies;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

**INTRODUCTION AND THEME OF TODAY’S EVENT**

On Saturday, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government wrapped up the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children; and launched the 365 campaign against gender-based violence and femicide, in uMzumbe Municipality, under uGu District.

The provincial government launched the 365 days campaign because women and girls face abuse on a daily basis.

It is depressing that 28 years after democracy, we are still discussing the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide which is still engulfing our province and country.

Is this the promised freedom and land our forefathers and foremothers fought for – a land still crying out loud for women emancipation?

What kind of freedom is it that deprives women and girls the liberty to walk the streets and pathways of our country without fear or intimidation?

What is it that needs to be done to eradicate this scourge from the face of the earth?

Who is to blame? Is it justifiable to blame women for being the victims of GBVF?

Today’s event is aptly themed: “**UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls.”**

Gender-based violence and femicide has gravely divided the community across gender lines. It will take unity to defeat violence against women and girls.

For GBVF to be defeated, it calls for women to transcend helplessness and despair.

Oprah Winfrey agrees with this notion in this quotation: **“I choose to rise up out of that storm and see that in moments of desperation, fear, and helplessness, each of us can be a rainbow of hope, doing what we can to extend ourselves in kindness and grace to one another. And I know for sure that there is no them - there's only us.”**

Unity among women has power to conquer the scourge of GBVF.

In 1956, it took the unity of more than 20 000 women of all races, different backgrounds, classes and cultures to challenge and defeat the oppressive pass laws of the apartheid regime.

Likewise, today’s event unites women across the country, from different backgrounds, classes and cultures; in an effort to defeat gender-based violence and femicide.

Like the women of 1956, we too can conquer the cancer of gender-based violence, which has reached pandemic proportions. United, we can make an impact in our fight against GBV.

**ROLE OF WOMANPACT IN FIGHTING GBV**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is such an honour to partner in this event with WomanPACT Foundation, which plays a significant role in the overall emancipation of women at grass roots level.

As mentioned before, the fight against GBV needs more armoury and weaponry to be effectively defeated.

WomanPACT possesses such armoury and weaponry in the fight against GBV. Those in the know say there is strength in numbers.

Representing the voices of more than 200 000 women across South Africa, WomanPACT has the required numbers needed to fight the scourge of GBV.

We have now entered the age of fourth industrial revolution, where technology rules the roost. Our province recently launched technology programmes geared towards a Smart province.

Our partnership with WomanPACT will ensure that we are not left behind in technological advancements.

Armed with technology, our fight against GBVF will be fortified.

We applaud WomanPACT’s phenomenal growth, taking into consideration that you are only two years old. May you continue to grow by leaps and bounds in your fight against GBV and femicide.

May you continue to be the voice of the voiceless which echoes across valleys, villages, townships and suburbs where women are stifled and strangled by GBVF.

May your programmes bring hope, healing and solace to those who are afflicted by GBVF.

As the Office of the Premier in KwaZulu-Natal, we pledge to work in partnership and collaboration with you until the scourge of gender-based violence is wiped away from the face of the earth.

Your care, compassion and consideration for the victims and survivors of GBV does not go unnoticed.

It is organisations like WomanPACT that revive and resurrect hope, where such had vanished.

**MEN ARE ALSO VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Men are also on the receiving end of GBV but are afraid to report it for fear of being ridiculed by society.

Society tends to frown upon men who report incidents of gender-based violence to police, family or community structures.

Such men are perceived as too soft or unfit to be called men.

Many prefer to suffer in silence than to face ridicule or scorn from society.

We condemn this because it perpetuates stereotypes against men who are victims of GBV.

We are grateful that we have a Captain from the local police station in our midst today.

Captain Naidoo, we have a humble appeal and message directed to the police, which earnestly urge you to take to your colleagues with you.

Our appeal to the police, Captain Naidoo, is for them to treat all gender-based crimes against men and women on an equal basis.

Let there be no gender bias in the way these cases are treated.

Police need to refrain from poking fun at men who suffer abuse and violence at home as this discourages them from reporting GBV incidents.

With the advent of Covid-19 more than two years ago, reported incidents of gender-based violence increased.

With the introduction of lockdown rules which accompanied the advent of Covid-19, more couples and partners found themselves confined into spaces which became fertile ground for abusive and violent behaviour.

Enforced familiarity bred contempt and anger which resulted in increased violence among partners who were not used to being together at home for extended days and hours because of the pandemic.

The pandemic wreaked havoc with the economy, leaving men without employment. Unable to fend for their families, retrenched men felt distraught and devastated and tended to violently vent their frustrations on women and children.

Gender-based violence presents itself in manifold forms which include rape, physical and sexual abuse of women and children. GBV is regarded as another pandemic which was worsened with Covid-19 pandemic.

This resulted in an increased number of reported GBV cases against women and children and most victims fled the abusive husbands and fathers in search of protective places of shelter against domestic violence.

Many people who oppose gender-based violence, call for an end to it. The call for an end to GBV is not enough if it is not accompanied by actions.

We need to rise up in arms and take action against GBV, especially men, as this Unknown Author appeals: **“The violence perpetrated by men against women must stop - and it's up to men to stop it. It is up to men to speak up and step in when they witness violence against women, and it is up to men to condemn the indefensible actions of the few and assert the will of the many.”**

It is sad that the minority who perpetrate GBV are holding the majority at ransom.

It is high time the majority shouted and acted in unison to end GBV.

**SHELTERS FOR VICTIMS OF GBV**

To curb and combat the escalating, widespread gender-based violence incidents against women and children, government decided to establish the white door centres of hope to help the victims of domestic violence which result in the breakdown of families and homes.

The breakdown of homes and families has a ripple effect in communities. Research reveals that many children who come from broken families become a liability to communities if no immediate action is taken alleviate the situation.

Research reveals that there are dire consequences of violence on children who hail from violent homes. They in turn tend to become violent to their future partners.

It is vicious cycle, if left unabated, has the potential to be blown out of proportion.

Apart from white door centres of hope, the provincial government also has Thuthuzela Centres which are found in hospitals and police stations.

We urge the victims of GBV to use this centres and shelters to access help, advice as well as counselling pertaining to all forms of violence prevalent in our communities.

**GBVF DEPRIVES DEVELOPMENT**

It is true that gender-based violence undermines development, equality and humanity of the community where this scourge is prevalent.

Even Ban Ki-moon, former United Nations Secretary-General, agrees that GBV is a threat to development: **“Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world. It is a threat to all women, and an obstacle to all our efforts for development, peace, and gender equality in all societies. Violence against women is always a violation of human rights; it is always a crime; and it is always unacceptable. Let us take this issue with the deadly seriousness that it deserves.”**

For real development and equality to take place, it is crucial that we do not bury our heads in the sand and tackle GBV head on.

In fact, gender-based violence needs to be declared as a crime against humanity. It is one of the worst crimes perpetrated against women and children.

We appeal to members of the community to be vocal when they witness acts of abuse and violence being committed against women and children.

These horrific acts need to be reported to relevant authorities immediately.

Silence encourages perpetrators of GBV to commit it with impunity when members of the community turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to it.

Women experience gender-based violence even from the workplace, from their colleagues and managers. We beg them to report these perpetrators so that they face the music.

Financial dependence on the person who commits gender-based violence is not a viable reason to stay in an abusive relationship.

Ladies and gentlemen, we urge relatives to refrain from dissuading those who suffer abuse in relationships from leaving those abusive relationships.

Stories abound of women who urge other women to stay in such relationships for fear of being called omabuy’emendweni (divorcees).

It is commendable to leave an abusive relationship alive than to leave it in a coffin after succumbing to its deadly consequences.

There are sad stories of women who put up with gender-based violence, only to die at the hands of their tormentors.

We urge women to flee from such relationships before they pay with their lives.

**GBV PERPETRATORS NEED STIFF PUNISHMENT**

We appeal to the police to follow reported GBV cases to their conclusive end. Perpetrators of gender-based violence need to feel the full force of the law so that they stop committing this abominable act.

We also urge men to campaign relentlessly for an end to gender-based violence and femicide.

A nation that kills its women and children kills its own future as women are mothers of the nation and children are its future.

It is our earnest hope that these diary sessions will bring light to communities to forge a united force to fight the darkness of gender-based violence and femicide which blurs our sight.

Ladies and gentlemen, GBV reflects badly on our forebears, who treated women and children with kid gloves.

Even during acts of war, our forebears spared women and children from death, violence or abuse, for the sake of peace.

We can emulate our forebears’ peace legacy by being ambassadors against gender-based violence and femicide which threaten to destroy the psyche of our nation.

The ball is in our hands to see to it that GBV is stopped from its tracks before it causes untold damage to our women and girls.

Ladies and gentlemen, since we are gathered in Phoenix today, a settlement founded by the Father of Satyagraha, the mighty Mahatma Gandhi, I find it fitting and proper that I close with a quote from him.

The Mahatma detested any form of violence, irrespective of who it was directed to.

If the Mahatma was still alive today, he would have condemned gender-based violence and femicide; and would have ostracised and isolated those who perpetrate and perpetuate it.

In memory of iconic leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, let us continue to unite and fight GBVF in our respective communities.

Describing the power of non-violence, Gandhi had this to say: **"Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."**

If we are united in our fight against GBV, we have a potent and powerful weapon at our disposal to defeat it.

If we do not curb and conquer gender-based violence and femicide, it has the potential to defeat us and dash our hopes for a brighter future, free of violence and abuse.

I thank you.